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STATEMENT BY REPRESENTATIVE DAVE CAMP

BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS,
RECREATION AND PUBLIC LANDS

JULY 15, 2003

H.R. 408 (CAMP)- TO PROVIDE FOR THE EXPANSION OF THE SLEEPING BEAR DUNES NATIONAL LAKESHORE

Thank you Mr. Chairman for conducting this hearing today. I appreciate your Subcommittee's willingness to consider H.R. 408, a bill I introduced in January that would provide for the expansion of the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore. This legislation represents the culmination of years of debate on the issue of whether, or how, to include certain acreage into the Park Service system. I am pleased that the former Director of the National Park Service (NPS), Mr. Jim Ridenour could be here with me to attest the significant benefits that H.R. 408 will deliver to Michigan residents and tourists alike.

There are two main points that I would like to make today. One, this bill will help protect a pristine, globally rare, parcel of land from future development and enhance the scenic beauty of the Lakeshore. Two, all interested parties including the NPS, the current owners of the property, local environmental groups, and the community all support this legislation. I am pleased to share with the Subcommittee a statement of support submitted for the record by one of the local environmental groups, the Friends of the Crystal River, that have long been involved in attempts to resolve this previous land dispute. I would like to submit their statement for the record.

Mr. Chairman, this legislation is simple; H.R. 408 would authorize the NPS to purchase 104 acres of property now owned by a private resort community and include it within the boundaries of the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore ("Lakeshore"). The history behind the bill, however, is complex and deserves some explanation. I think it is important to briefly share with the Subcommittee how we got to the point we are now with the consideration of H.R. 408.

In the mid 1980's The Homestead, a privately owned resort community located in Glen Arbor, Michigan, purchased property that included frontage on the Crystal River. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service describes this property as "globally rare." Since the purchase of the Crystal River property, the owners of The Homestead have sought to build a golf course and over 30 single-family homes. The resort's desire to build on the pristine acreage caused concern among a number of community residents and local environmental groups who opposed development of the property.

To resolve the dispute, The Homestead and the NPS began discussions to trade, or "swap", the environmentally sensitive riverfront property for acreage already include in the Lakeshore. However, residents and area environmental organizations soundly rejected the idea of a swap. Opponents of the swap idea argued that it would unfairly give land from one private landowner to another. Back in the 1970's the federal government condemned private land and included it in the Lakeshore. At the time, the federal government indicated to the private landowners that the land would be protected for the public to enjoy. The idea of trading that land to be developed into a golf course and homes was not a policy local residents and environmental groups could endorse.

Finally, after much negotiation and compromise, a compromise has been reached that aims to benefit all stakeholders. The deal is embodied in H.R. 408, a bill I introduced with Representative Bart Stupak. The legislation authorizes the Park Service to acquire approximately 104 acres of property currently owned by The Homestead resort and include it within the boundaries of the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore. H.R. 408 stipulates that the purchase of this land be made on a "willing seller" basis. This stipulation was included intentionally to provide assurances to The Homestead that their property will not be taken or

withheld from them for any reason without their express consent. The bill also prohibits the Park Service from acquiring the property by an exchange or “swap”.

At present, an independent surveyor is performing an appraisal of the property. It is expected that the appraised value of the land will be determined by the end of this month. At that time, the willing sellers, the owners of The Homestead, will ask the NPS to purchase the property. I am hopeful that the NPS will be provided the necessary budgetary allowances to buy the property and settle this longstanding dispute. Before we get to a final resolution that has eluded these stakeholders for years now, H.R. 408 needs the support of the Subcommittee. I urge you to adopt this measure and I appreciate your willingness to consider the merits of this important legislation. Thank you.